



New York Field Office Environmental Contaminants Program

"The most alarming of all man's assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and the sea with dangerous and even lethal materials."

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

Environmental contamination is one of America's greatest environmental concerns. Annually, 136 million pounds of toxic chemicals are discharged directly into the nation's rivers, streams, and lakes; while, approximately 4 billion pounds of pesticides are applied to the land. Fish and wildlife often signal environmental contamination unnoticed by any other means: fish kills in creeks, tumors on fish, birds lying dead on a field, young birds with crossed bills, or reproductive failure of long-lived fish eating birds like eagles, pelicans, or cormorants. The New York Field Office's (NYFO) environmental contaminants program is responsible for responding to the threats contamination poses to fish and wildlife. NYFO contaminant biologists are responsible for natural resource damage assessment and restoration, hazardous spill response, and technical assistance to State and Federal agencies and National Wildlife Refuges.

Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program (NRDAR)

*... working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants,
and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American People.*

Mission: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The NRDAR Program is vital to the Service's mission. It was created to restore fish and wildlife, and their habitats, injured or impaired by environmental contamination. Congress has established a "polluter pays" principle to fund the NRDAR activities that start after a hazardous substance, released into the environment, injures natural resources and results in a loss of services they provide.

NYFO environmental contaminant specialists calculate the costs and the means to restore these resources and their services. Their focus is on resources the Service is entrusted to conserve, protect, and enhance for the American public including: migratory birds, endangered and threatened species, anadromous and inter-jurisdictional fisheries and their habitats, Federally-managed lands, and certain marine animals.

The resources needed for restoration are calculated only after the full extent of the injuries to

natural resources are determined, and the details of site clean-up are known. Typically, the next phase is a settlement negotiation with the responsible parties for the cost of restoration, the loss of the use of the resources to the public, and the money the trustees spent on the assessment. Upon settlement, restoration activities are planned and implemented. If negotiations are not completed successfully, the government has the option to recover damages through the courts. Planning for restoration of the resources may require public notification of the intent to restore the site, and public participation to help identify specific restoration projects.

Natural Resource Damage Assessments have been successfully concluded for the following sites:

Applied Environmental Service, Inc. (Nassau County)
Brewster Well Field (Putnam County)
Cortese Landfill (Sullivan County)
Hi View Terrace (Erie County)
Love Canal (Niagara County)
Wide Beach Development (Erie County)
102nd Street Landfill (Niagara County)

Technical Assistance

Because NYFO contaminant specialists have unique expertise pertaining to the effects of environmental contaminants on fish and wildlife, they provide technical assistance invaluable in the resolution of complex environmental contamination issues. Technical assistance relating to fish and wildlife affected by contamination at Superfund sites, and by site clean-up, is provided by Service representation on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Biological Technical Assistance Group (BTAG). It has resulted in the preservation of muskellunge spawning habitat in the Niagara River, protection of bald eagle habitat in central New York, and maintenance of grass landfill caps for songbirds. Technical assistance may also be provided to National Wildlife Refuges when environmental contaminants may pose questions regarding actual or potential uptake by fish and wildlife of contaminants from soils, or to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers during review of applications for dredge and fill permits. NYFO's contaminant biologists also conduct field and laboratory assessments to provide environmental contaminants technical assistance.

Hazardous Spill Response

NYFO contaminant specialists respond to oil spills, or the release or spill of other hazardous substances. Responses are coordinated with other Federal and State agencies to assist with clean-up, wildlife recovery and rehabilitation, and collection and interpretation of information used in natural resource damage assessments and restorations.

For Additional Information

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
New York Field Office
3817 Luker Road
Cortland, New York 13045
(607) 753-9334

Or, try these Internet sites:

<http://contaminants.fws.gov>

<http://restoration.doi.gov>

<http://epa.gov/superfund/programs/nrd>